Ruling on celebrating the birthday of the Prophet

Shaykh Dr. Saalih ibn Fawzaan al-Fawzaan

Member of the Committee of Senior Scholars, Saudi Arabia.

Praise be to Allaah the Lord of the Worlds, and blessings and peace be upon our Prophet Muhammad and all his family and companions.

The commands mentioned in the Qur'aan and Sunnah to follow the laws of Allaah and His Messenger, and the prohibitions on introducing innovations into the religion are quite clear. Allaah says (interpretation of the meaning):

"Say (O Muhammad to mankind): 'If you (really) love Allaah, then follow me (i.e. accept Islamic Monotheism, follow the Qur'aan and the Sunnah), Allaah will love you and forgive you your sins'"

[Aal 'Imraan 3:31]

"Follow what has been sent down unto you from your Lord (the Qur'aan and Prophet Muhammad's Sunnah), and follow not any Awliyaa' (protectors and helpers who order you to associate partners in worship with Allaah), besides Him (Allaah). Little do you remember!"

[al-A'raaf 7:3]

"And verily, this is My straight path, so follow it, and follow not (other) paths, for they will separate you away from His path"

[al-A'naam 6:153]

And the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) said: "The most truthful of speech is the Book of Allaah and the best of guidance is the guidance of Muhammad, and the most evil of things are those which are newly-invented." And he (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) said: "Whoever innovates anything in this matter of ours (i.e., Islam), that is not part of it will have it rejected." (Narrated by al-Bukhaari, no. 2697; Muslim, no. 1718). According to a version narrated by Muslim, "Whoever doe anything that is not in accordance with this matter of ours (i.e., Islam), will have it rejected."

Among the reprehensible innovations that people have invented is the celebration of the birthday of the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) in the month of Rabee' al-Awwal. They celebrate this occasion in various ways:

Some of them simply make it an occasion to gather and read the story of the Mawlid, then they present speeches and qaseedahs (odes) for this occasion.

Some of them make food and sweets etc., and offer them to the people present.

Some of them hold these celebrations in the mosques, and some of them hold them

in their houses.

Some people do not limit themselves to the actions mentioned above; they include in these gatherings haraam and reprehensible things, such as free mixing of men and women, dancing and singing, or committing actions of shirk such as seeking the help of the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him), calling upon him, seeking his support against their enemies and so on.

Whatever form it takes and whatever the intentions of those who do this are, there is no doubt whatsoever that it is an invented, haraam innovation which was introduced by the Shi'a Faatimids after the three best centuries, in order to corrupt the religion of the Muslims. The first person to do this after them was the king al-Muzaffar Abu Sa'eed Kawkaboori, the king of Irbil, at the end of the sixth century or the beginning of the seventh century AH, as was mentioned by the historians such as Ibn Khalkaan and others. Abu Shaamah said: the first person to do that in Mosul was Shaykh 'Umar ibn Muhammad al-Malaa, one of the well-known righteous people. Then the ruler of Irbil and others followed his example.

Al-Haafiz Ibn Katheer said in al-Bidaayah wa'l-Nihaayah (13/137), in his biography of Abu Sa'eed Kazkaboori: "He used to observe the Mawlid in Rabee' al-Awwal and hold a huge celebration on that occasion… some of those who were present at the feast of al-Muzaffar on some occasions of the Mawlid said that he used to offer in the feast five thousand grilled heads of sheep, ten thousand chickens and one hundred thousand large dishes, and thirty trays of sweets… he would let the Sufis sing from Zuhr until Fajr, and he himself would dance with them."

Ibn Khalkaan said in Wafiyaat al-A'yaan (3/274): "When it is the first of Safar they decorate those domes with various kinds of fancy adornments, and in every dome there sits a group of singers and a group of puppeteers and players of musical instruments, and they do not leave any one of those domes without setting up a group (of performers) there.

The people give up work during this period, and they do no work except going around and watching the entertainment. When there are two days to go until the Mawlid, they bring out a large number of camels, cows and sheep, more than can be described, and they accompany them with all the drums, songs and musical instruments that they have, until they bring them to the square… On the night of the Mawlid there are performances of nasheed after Maghrib in the citadel."

This is the origin of this celebration on the occasion of the Prophet's birthday. More recently idle entertainment, extravagance, and wasting of money and time have become associated with an innovation for which Allaah has not sent down any authority.

What Muslims should do is to revive the Sunnah and put an end to bid'ah (innovation); they should not do any action until they know the ruling of Allaah concerning it.

Celebrating the occasion of the birthday of the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) is forbidden and is to be rejected for a number of reasons:

1 – it is not part of the Sunnah of the Messenger (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) or of the khaleefahs who succeeded him. Since this is the case, then it is a forbidden innovation, because the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) said: "I urge you to follow my Sunnah and the way of the rightly-guided khaleefahs after me; adhere to it and cling to it firmly. Beware of newly-invented things, for every newly-invented thing is an innovation (bid'ah) and every innovation is a going-astray." (Narrated by Ahmad, 4/126; al-Tirmidhi no. 2676).

Celebrating the Mawlid is an innovation introduced by the Shi'a Faatimids after the three best centuries in order to corrupt the religion of the Muslims. If a person does anything in order to draw closer to Allaah which was not done by the Messenger (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) or enjoined by him, and was not done by the khaleefahs who succeeded him, this action implies that he is accusing the Messenger of not explaining the religion to the people, and that he disbelieves in the words of Allaah (interpretation of the meaning):

"This day, I have perfected your religion for you"

[al-Maa'idah 5:3]

because he is adding something extra and claiming that it is a part of the religion, but the Messenger (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) did not bring this.

2 – Celebrating the birthday of the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) is an imitation of the Christians, because they celebrate the birth of the Messiah (peace be upon him). Imitating them is extremely haraam. The hadeeth tells us that it is forbidden to imitate the kuffaar, and we are commanded to differ from them. The Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) said: "Whoever imitates a people is one of them" (narrated by Ahmad, 2/50; Abu Dawood, 4/314). And he said, "Be different from the mushrikeen" (narrated by Muslim, 1/222, no. 259) – especially with regard to things that are the symbols or rituals of their religion.

3 – Besides being bid'ah and an imitation of the Christians, both of which are haraam, celebrating the birthday of the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) is also a means that leads to exaggeration and excess in venerating him, which even goes as far as calling upon him (making du'aa' to him) and seeking his help, instead of calling upon Allaah, as happens now among many of those who observe the bid'ah of the Mawlid, when they call upon the Messenger instead of Allaah, and ask him for support, and sing qaseedahs (odes) of shirk praising him, like Qaseedat al-Burdah etc. The Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) forbade going to extremes in praising him, as he said: "Do not extol as the Christians extolled the son of Maryam. For I am just His slave, so say, the slave of

Allaah and His Messenger" (narrated by al-Bukhaari, 4/142, no. 3445; al-Fath, 6/551), i.e., do not exaggerate in praising me as the Christians exaggerated in praising the Messiah and venerated him until they worshipped him instead of Allaah. Allaah forbade them to do that when he said (interpretation of the meaning):

"O people of the Scripture (Christians)! Do not exceed the limits in your religion, nor say of Allaah aught but the truth. The Messiah 'Eesa (Jesus), son of Maryam (Mary), was (no more than) a Messenger of Allaah and His Word, ("Be!" — and he was) which He bestowed on Maryam (Mary) and a spirit (Rooh) created by Him"

[al-Nisaa' 4:171]

Our Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) forbade us to exaggerate concerning him lest the same thing happen to us as happened to them, so he said: "Beware of exaggeration, for those who came before you were destroyed because of exaggeration" (narrated by al-Nasaa'i, 5/268; classed as saheeh by al-Albaani in Saheeh Sunan al-Nasaa'i, no. 2863).

4 – Observing the innovation of the Prophet's birthday opens the door to other kinds of bid'ah and being distracted by them from the Sunnah. Hence you find that the innovators are very active when it comes to bid'ah and very lazy when it comes to the Sunnah; they hate it and regard those who follow it as enemies, until their entire religion is innovated anniversaries and Mawlids. They have split into various groups, each of which commemorates the anniversary of its imaam's birth, such as the births of al-Badawi, Ibn 'Arabi, al-Dasooqi and al-Shaadhili. No sooner do they end the celebration of one birthday but they start the celebration of another. This results in exaggeration concerning these dead people and others, and in calling upon them instead of Allaah, believing that they can bring benefit and cause harm, until they deviate from the religion of Allaah and go back to the religion of the people of the Jaahiliyyah of whom Allaah says (interpretation of the meaning):

"And they worship besides Allaah things that harm them not, nor profit them, and they say: 'These are our intercessors with Allaah'"

[Yoonus 10:18]

"And those who take Awliyaa' (protectors, helpers, lords, gods) besides Him (say): 'We worship them only that they may bring us near to Allaah'"

[al-Zumar 39:3]

Discussing the specious arguments of those who celebrate the Mawlid

Those who think that this bid'ah should be continued produce specious arguments which are flimsier than a spider's web. These specious arguments may be dealt with as follows:

1 – Their claim that this is veneration of the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him):

The response to that is that the way to venerate him is to obey him, do as he commanded and avoid that which he forbade, and to love him; he is not to be venerated through innovations, myths and sins. Celebrating his birthday is of this blameworthy type because it is a sin. The people who venerated the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) the most were the Sahaabah (may Allaah be pleased with them), as 'Urwah ibn Mas'ood said to Quraysh: "O people, by Allaah I have visited kings. I went to Caesar, Chosroes and the Negus, but by Allaah I never saw a king whose companions venerated him as much as the companions of Muhammad venerated Muhammad (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him). By Allaah, whenever he spat it never fell on the ground, it fell into into the hand of one his companions, then they wiped their faces and skins with it. If he instructed them to do something, they would hasten to do as he commanded. When he did wudoo', they would almost fight over his water. When he spoke they would lower their voices in his presence; and they did not stare at him out of respect for him." (al-Bukhaari, 3/178, no. 2731, 2732; al-Fath, 5/388). Yet despite this level of veneration, they never took the day of his birth as an 'Eid (festival). If that had been prescribed in Islam they would not have neglected to do that.

2 – Using as evidence the fact that many people in many countries do this.

The response to that is that evidence consists of that which is proven from the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him), and what is proven from the Prophet is that innovations are forbidden in general, and this is an innovation. What people do, if it goes against the evidence (daleel), does not prove anything, even if many of them do it.

"And if you obey most of those on the earth, they will mislead you far away from Allaah's path"

[al-An'aam 6:116 – interpretation of the meaning]

Nevertheless, in every age, praise be to Allaah, there have always been those who denounce this bid'ah and state clearly that it is false. Those who persist in following it after the truth had been explained to them have no proof.

Among those who denounced the celebration of this occasion was Shaykh al-Islam Ibn Taymiyah, in Iqtidaa' al-Siraat al-Mustaqeem; Imaam al-Shaatibi in al-'I'tisaam; Ibn al-Haaj in al-Madkhil; Shaykh Taaj al-Deen 'Ali ibn 'Umar al-Lakhami who wrote an entire book denouncing it; Shaykh Muhammad Basheer al-Sahsawaani al-Hindi in his book Siyaanah al-Insaan; al-Sayyid Muhammad Rasheed Ridaa wrote a separate essay on this topic; Shaykh Muhammad ibn Ibraaheem Aal al-Shaykh wrote a separate essay on it; Shaykh 'Abd al-'Azeez ibn Baaz; and others who are still writing and denouncing this bid'ah every year in the pages of newspapers and magazines, at the time when this bid'ah is being done.

3 – They say that by celebrating the Mawlid they are keeping the memory of the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) alive.

The answer to that is that the memory of the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) is constantly kept alive by the Muslim, such as when his name (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) is mentioned in the adhaan and iqaamah and in khutbahs, and every time the Muslim recites the Shahaadatayn after doing wudoo' and in the prayers, and every time he sends blessings upon the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) in his prayers and when he is mentioned, and every time the Muslim does a waajib (obligatory) or mustahabb (recommended) action that was prescribed by the Messenger (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him). In all of these ways (the Muslim) remembers him and the reward equivalent to the reward of the one who does that action goes back to the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him). Thus the Muslim constantly keeps the memory of the Messenger alive and has a connection with him night and day throughout his life through that which Allaah has prescribed, not only on the day of the Mawlid and things which are bid'ah and go against the Sunnah, for that puts one at a distance from the Messenger (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) and the Messenger will disown him because of that.

The Messenger (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) has no need of this innovated celebration, because Allaah has already bestowed veneration and respect upon him, as He says:

"and raised high your fame"

[al-Sharh 94:4]

For Allaah is not mentioned in the adhaan, iqaamah or khutbah, but the Messenger (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) is mentioned after Him; this is sufficient veneration, love and renewal of his memory, ad sufficient encouragement to follow him.

Allaah did not refer to the birth of the Messenger (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) in the Qur'aan, rather He referred to his Mission, and says (interpretation of the meaning):

"Indeed, Allaah conferred a great favour on the believers when He sent among them a Messenger (Muhammad) from among themselves"

[Aal 'Imraan 3:124]

"He it is Who sent among the unlettered ones a Messenger (Muhammad) from among themselves"

[al-Jumu'ah 64:2]

4 – They may say that the celebration of the Prophet's birthday was introduced by a knowledgeable and just king who intended thereby to draw closer to Allaah.

Our response to that is that bid'ah is not acceptable, no matter who does it. A good intention does not justify a bad deed and even if a person died as a knowledgeable and righteous person, this does not mean that he was infallible.

5 – They say that celebrating the mawlid comes under the heading of bid'ah hasanah ("good innovation") because it is based on giving thanks to Allaah for the Prophet!

Our response to that is that there is nothing good in innovation. The Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) said: "Whoever innovates anything in this matter of ours (i.e., Islam), that is not part of it will have it rejected." (Narrated by al-Bukhaari, no. 2697; al-Fath, 5/355). And he said, "Every innovation is a going astray" (narrated by Ahmad, 4/126; al-Tirmidhi, no. 2676). The ruling on innovations is that they are all misguidance, but this specious argument suggests that not every bid'ah is a going astray, rather there are good innovations.

Al-Haafiz ibn Rajab said in Sharh al-Arba'een: "The words of the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him), 'every innovation is a going astray' is a concise but comprehensive comment which includes everything; it is one of the most important principles of religion. It is like his words 'Whoever innovates anything in this matter of ours (i.e., Islam), that is not part of it will have it rejected.' (Narrated by al-Bukhaari, 3/167, no. 2697; al-Fath, 5/355). Whoever innovates anything and attributes it to Islam when it has no basis in the religion, this is a going astray and is nothing to do with Islam, whether that has to do with matters of belief ('aqeedah) or outward and inward words and deeds."

(Jaami' al-'Uloom wa'l-Hakam, p. 233)

These people have no proof that there is any such thing as a "good innovation" apart from the words of 'Umar (may Allaah be pleased with him) concerning Taraaweeh prayers, "What a good innovation this is." (Saheeh al-Bukhaari, 2/252, no. 2010 mu'allaqan; al-Fath 4/294).

They also said that things were innovated which were not denounced by the salaf, such as compiling the Qur'aan into one volume and writing and compiling the hadeeth.

The response to that is that these matters had a basis in Islam, so they were not newly-invented.

'Umar said: "What a good bid'ah" meaning innovation in the linguistic sense, not in the shar'i sense. Whatever has a basis in Islam, if it is described as an innovation, is an innovation in the linguistic sense, not in the shar'i sense, because innovation in

the shar'i sense means that which has no basis in Islam.

Compiling the Qur'aan into one book has a basis in Islam, because the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) had commanded that the Qur'aan be written down, but it was scattered, so the Sahaabah compiled it in one volume so as so protect and preserve it.

The Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) led his companions in praying Taraaweeh for a while, then he stopped doing that, lest that become obligatory on them. The Sahaabah (may Allaah be pleased with them) continued to pray it separately during the life of the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) and after his death, until 'Umar ibn al-Khattaab (may Allaah be pleased with them) gathered them behind one imaam as they used to pray behind the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him). This was not an innovation introduced into the religion.

Writing down the hadeeth also has a basis in Islam. The Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) ordered that some ahaadeeth should be written down for some of his companions when they asked him for that. In general terms writing it down during his lifetime was not allowed, for fear that the Qur'aan might be mixed with things that were not part of it. When the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) died, this fear was no longer a factor, because the Qur'aan had been completed and arranged in order before he died. The Muslims compiled the Sunnah after that in order to preserve it and keep it from being lost. May Allaah reward them with good on behalf of Islam and the Muslims, because they preserved the Book of their Lord and the Sunnah of their Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) from being lost or being tampered with.

We may also say to them: why was this act of thanksgiving, as they call it, not done by the best generations, the Sahaabah, Taabi'een and followers of the Taabi'een, who loved the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) most and who were most keen to do good and give thanks? Are those who introduced the innovation of the Mawlid more rightly-guided than them? Do they give more thanks to Allaah? Definitely not!

6 – They may say that celebrating the birthday of the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) is indicative of their love for him; this is one way of showing that, and showing love of the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) is prescribed in Islam!

The answer to that is that undoubtedly loving the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) is obligatory for every Muslim; he should love him more than he loves himself, his child, his father and all the people – may my father and mother be sacrificed for him – but that does not mean that we should introduce innovations for doing so that have not been prescribed for us. Loving him dictates that we should obey him and follow him, for that is one of the greatest manifestations of love, as it is said:

"If your love is sincere then obey him; for the lover obeys the one whom he loves."

Loving the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) implies keeping his Sunnah alive, adhering firmly to it, and avoiding words and deeds that go against it. Undoubtedly everything that goes against his Sunnah is a reprehensible innovation (bid'ah) and a manifest act of disobedience. That includes celebrating his birthday and other kinds of bid'ah. A good intention does not mean that it is permissible to introduce innovations into the religion. Islam is based on two things, purity of intention and following [the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him)]. Allaah says (interpretation of the meaning):

"Yes, but whoever submits his face (himself) to Allaah (i.e. follows Allaah's religion of Islamic Monotheism) and he is a Muhsin (a doer of good) then his reward is with his Lord (Allaah), on such shall be no fear, nor shall they grieve"

[al-Baqarah 2:112]

Submitting one's face to Allaah means being sincere towards Allaah, and doing good means following the Messenger and implementing the Sunnah.

7 – Another of their specious arguments is when they say that by celebrating the Mawlid and reading the biography of the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) on this occasion, they are encouraging people to follow his example!

We say to them that reading the biography of the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) and following his example are required of the Muslim all the time, all year long and throughout his life. Singling out a specific day for that with no evidence for doing so is an innovation, and every innovation is a going astray." (Narrated by Ahmad, 4/164; al-Tirmidhi, 2676). Bid'ah does not bear any fruit but evil and it leads to a person distancing himself from the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him).

In conclusion, celebrating the birthday of the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him), whatever form it takes, is a reprehensible innovation. The Muslims should put a stop to this and other kinds of bid'ah, and occupy themselves with reviving and adhering to the Sunnah. They should not be deceived by those who promote and defend this bid'ah, for these types of people are more interested in keeping innovations alive than in reviving the Sunnah; they may not even care about the Sunnah at all. Whoever is like this, it is not permissible to imitate him or follow his example, even if the majority of people are like this. Rather we should follow the example of those who follow the path of the Sunnah, among the righteous salaf and their followers, even if they are few. Truth is not measured by the men who speak it, rather men are measured by the truth.

The Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) said: "Whoever among you lives (for a long time) will see many differences. I urge you to follow my Sunnah and the way of the rightly-guided khaleefahs who come after me. Hold on to it firmly.

Beware of newly-invented matters, for every innovation is a going astray." (Narrated by Ahmad, 4/126; al-Tirmidhi no. 2676). So the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) explained to us in this hadeeth what we should do when there are differences of opinion, just as he explained that everything that goes against his Sunnah, be it words or deeds, is a bid'ah, and every bid'ah is a going astray.

If we see that there is no basis for celebrating the birthday of the Prophet, whether in the Sunnah of the Messenger of Allaah (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) or in the way of the rightly-guided khaleefahs, then it is one of the newly-invented matters, one of the bid'ahs which lead people astray. This principle is what is implied by this hadeeth and is what is indicated by the aayah (interpretation of the meaning):

"O you who believe! Obey Allaah and obey the Messenger (Muhammad), and those of you (Muslims) who are in authority. (And) if you differ in anything amongst yourselves, refer it to Allaah and His Messenger, if you believe in Allaah and in the Last Day. That is better and more suitable for final determination"

[al-Nisaa' 4:59]

Referring to Allaah means referring to His Book, and referring to the Messenger (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) means referring to his Sunnah after he has passed away. The Qur'aan and Sunnah are the reference point in cases of dispute. Where in the Qur'aan or Sunnah does it indicate that it is prescribed in Islam to celebrate the Prophet's birthday? Whoever does that or thinks that it is good must repent to Allaah from this and from other kinds of bid'ah. This is the attitude of the Muslim who is seeking the truth. But whoever is too stubborn and arrogant after proof has been established, then his reckoning will be with his Lord.

We ask Allaah to help us adhere to His Book and the Sunnah of His Messenger until the Day when we will meet Him. May Allaah grant blessings and peace to our Prophet Muhammad and his family and companions.

Huqooq al-Nabi (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) bayna al-Ijlaal wa'l-Ikhlaal, p. 139

Shaykh Dr. Saalih ibn Fawzaan al-Fawzaan

Member of the Committee of Senior Scholars, Saudi Arabia.